

Stephenson College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Stephenson College

East Midlands Region

Inspected November 1997

Stephenson College is a general further education college situated in Coalville, north west Leicestershire. The college produced a thorough self-assessment report which contains clear judgements. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements and grades in the report. Since the report was written, considerable progress has been made in improving some aspects of provision, such as resources and the induction of students. The report was produced through a comprehensive process of self-assessment which involved course teams, managers and the corporation.

The college offers courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Provision in four of the areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college provides an appropriate range of vocational education and training courses to meet the needs of students and industry. Much of the teaching is of a high standard. The pass rates of students who complete their course are good and in some instances, they are excellent. The quality of the leisure and tourism provision is outstanding. The corporation is effective in determining the

strategic direction of the college. The management structure helps the college to fulfil its strategic objectives. Quality assurance procedures work well. Much of the personal and pastoral support for students is effective. The equipment and accommodation are suitable for the courses offered and meet the needs of the curriculum and students. Recently, there has been substantial investment in computing equipment and the development of a new learning resource centre. New high-quality accommodation at Ashby-de-la-Zouch and the National Forest centre has just been opened. If it is to improve the quality of its provision, the college should address: the inconsistencies in tutorial practices; the need to ensure that management changes are fully implemented; and the need to extend quality assurance procedures to cover support functions.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering including motor vehicle	2	Support for students	3
Business	2	General resources	2
Leisure and tourism	1	Quality assurance	2
Childcare	2	Governance	2
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Stephenson College was founded in 1924 as Coalville Technical College. In 1997, it changed its name to Stephenson College. It was originally a mining college but with the decline of mining it diversified its curriculum. The main site is in Coalville in north west Leicestershire, and there is a second site, Ravenstone, on the outskirts of the town. To support its aim of providing a comprehensive range of further education courses in north west Leicestershire it has opened two new sites, in Ashby-de-la-Zouch and in Moira at the Bath Yard Centre, respectively. The latter is a renovated derelict colliery site designated as the 'heart of the national forest'. Coalville has a population of approximately 32,500. Its economy has diversified since the decline in mining although some quarrying and open cast work still remain. Employment is available with warehouse distribution, retail, food and dairy services and in light engineering, manufacturing, and small textile companies on recently developed industrial estates. There are also opportunities for employment in leisure and tourism linked to the National Forest. The unemployment rate is 3.5 per cent for the Coalville area and 2.6 per cent for Leicestershire, although there are some pockets of higher unemployment in the town and in the rural hinterland.

2 Thirty-eight per cent of school-leavers in the area from which the college draws most of its younger students achieve five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grade C or above compared with 40 per cent for Leicestershire as a whole. The college aims to complement the work of local schools for students aged 16 to 19. It provides only a small number of general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses. The proportion of young people in the area who stay on in full-time education after the age of 16 is 60 per cent and this is below the national average. The percentage of school-leavers who

obtain employment is 8 per cent and a further 10 per cent go on to government-funded training programmes. The largest provider of such training programmes in the area has premises on the college campus and provides programmes jointly with the college. Secondary education in the area is provided through middle and high schools. There are three 11 to 14 schools and two 14 to 18 schools in the college's main catchment area. Four further education colleges, including two large inner-city colleges, are within travelling distance of Coalville.

3 In 1996-97, the college had 9,450 enrolments of which 74 per cent were from students aged 19 years and over. During the last three years, the college has increased its enrolments by 70 per cent. The college is divided into three divisions: business, leisure and tourism and information technology; health, community care and humanities; and motor vehicle, engineering and construction. Inspection took place in each division.

4 The mission of the college is 'to provide easily accessible, structured learning opportunities to enable people to maximise their personal, creative and employment potential'. The college aims to make learning available to as many people in the north west Leicestershire community as possible by developing a range of centres based in schools and community centres. Individuals will be able to study courses using learning styles which they prefer, and through modes of attendance which suit their personal circumstances. Through information technology, students will be able to study at home, in the workplace, and at college.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 10 November 1997. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information about the college held by other

Context

divisions of the FEFC. The college was asked to submit data on students' achievements for the three years 1994 to 1997, but it could only provide data for two years in the format required. The data submitted were validated by an inspector against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Approximately two months before the inspection, the college was notified of the sample of its provision which was to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors working for 29 days, and by an auditor working for five days. They observed 48 lessons, and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. Inspectors evaluated the extent of consultation which the college has held with external bodies such as the Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local employers, and community groups. Meetings were held with governors, college managers and other staff, and students.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 69 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 6 per cent were judged to be less than satisfactory. This profile is better than the average for colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 85 per cent which is above the average for the sector

according to the same report. The highest attendances were in engineering at 92 per cent and in leisure and tourism at 91 per cent, and the lowest was in childcare at 77 per cent. The following table summarises the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	6	4	3	2	0	15
NVQ	4	8	4	0	0	16
Other vocational	0	6	2	1	0	9
Other*	1	4	3	0	0	8
Total	11	22	12	3	0	48

*other includes higher education and GCE A level classes

Curriculum Areas

Engineering including Motor Vehicle

Grade 2

7 The inspectors observed 13 lessons, covering both practical and theory lessons. The college's self-assessment report does not include comments on teaching and learning which the inspectors identified to be weak in some respects. The self-assessment pays insufficient attention to the poor achievements of some students.

Key strengths

- high standards of some practical teaching
- frequent and effective reference to practical applications in theory classes
- good achievements by most students and outstanding achievements by some
- good industrial partnerships
- teachers' up-to-date knowledge and expertise
- excellent heavy goods vehicle facilities

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention given to identifying and meeting the needs of all students
- some ineffective questioning of students by teachers
- weak achievements of students on a few courses

8 As stated in its self-assessment report the motor vehicle section has excellent links with a number of national heavy goods vehicle manufacturers. In partnership with them it has developed a range of courses. Manufacturers provide vehicles and other equipment for the college. Modes of attendance on courses are varied. Demand is particularly strong for short courses which aim to update the skills of those working with heavy vehicles. To meet local

needs more effectively the engineering section is developing a range of short courses in areas such as computer-aided design and pneumatics.

9 The inspection team agreed with the college's judgement that much of the practical teaching is good. Most practical classes are well structured, students are given good opportunities to develop their competences, and practical work is of a good standard. Teachers make clear to students the standards they require of them. In lessons, they make frequent and appropriate references to points of theory. Most students carry out their work carefully and safely. In a few practical sessions, poor practice goes uncorrected, students are unclear about the objectives of the lesson, they waste time waiting for help from the teacher, and the space available is not used effectively. These weaknesses are not identified in the self-assessment report. In theory sessions, and particularly in those on heavy goods vehicle courses, topics are developed logically and linked to related practical applications effectively. Teachers have up-to-date knowledge of current industrial developments and use this well in their teaching. In many groups there is a wide variation in students' abilities and some teachers fail to ensure that individual students receive the help they need. In some instances, teachers do not question students effectively to check that they understand the lesson and they fail to take opportunities to review previous work. Some aspects of numeracy work are poorly taught. Many of these weaknesses are not identified in the self-assessment report.

10 Students' achievements on most courses are good and some are outstanding. For example, all of the students who started the heavy vehicle national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 block-release course in 1996 completed their studies and over 90 per cent passed. On a few courses, the achievements are less satisfactory. Last year, on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) engineering course at advanced level and on the

Curriculum Areas

national diploma course in motor vehicle, retention rates were only 60 per cent. As identified in the self-assessment report, a small number of students' achievements on the day-release course leading to an NVQ in motor vehicle and on the higher national certificate course, are low. The section's plans for improving low achievements are insufficiently detailed.

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that students are provided with a good range of carefully planned assessments. All students receive an assessment pack containing assignment sheets and a breakdown of the marks for each assignment. Most written assignments require students to apply their knowledge to tasks which are practical and relevant. The quality of the written feedback which teachers provide on students' work varies. In the best practice, teachers clearly identify students' weaknesses and suggest ways

they might improve. The recording of marks is detailed and comprehensive. Most of the students' work is of a good standard. It is well researched and clearly presented, although in some instances students fail to draw conclusions from the research they have undertaken.

12 The inspection team agreed with the college's judgement that many of the specialist resources for engineering are good. The heavy goods vehicle centre at Ravenstone is an excellent facility. On the main site, the motor vehicle workshops are satisfactory. There is a well-equipped engineering workshop with computer-aided drawing and pneumatic equipment. There are shortcomings in the accommodation and equipment for science teaching and these are acknowledged in the self-assessment. There is some good course documentation, such as the learning packs for the heavy vehicle short courses.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering including motor vehicle, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced	Retention (%)	*	84	78
	Pass rate (%)	*	86	89
NVQs	Retention (%)	*	83	83
	Pass rate (%)	*	88	86

Source: college data

*college unable to provide data in format required

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

13 The inspection covered courses in business, business administration, secretarial skills, management, accounting and personnel. Inspectors observed 13 lessons. The self-assessment report identifies a number of strengths and weaknesses. However, some are overemphasised and others are not given sufficient weight. Nevertheless, inspection findings generally supported the college's own evaluation. A number of improvements have been made since the self-assessment, particularly in relation to the provision of information technology equipment and management of the curriculum.

Key strengths

- much good-quality teaching
- the high quality of, and good access to, information technology equipment
- high pass rates and good retention rates on the majority of courses
- the range and flexibility of programmes available
- the effective development of work-based assessment for NVQs
- imaginative and varied course assessment methods

Weaknesses

- poor students' achievements on some programmes
- insufficient opportunity for students to develop key skills as an integral part of their course
- some poor-quality handouts and teaching materials

14 There is a broad range of secretarial, business and professional courses. Some programmes have been adapted to meet the

needs of local employers and training providers. Full-time secretarial students are given a wide choice of subject and qualification options. Part-time office skills provision includes courses leading to NVQs in business administration which are also offered in the new Ashby-de-la-Zouch centre. A particular strength is the development of assessments for NVQs in the workplace or under workplace conditions. Links with industry are well established. There is scope for the college to provide short courses and more courses which students may join at any time. As the self-assessment recognises, programmes are well organised and documented.

15 The quality of teaching is generally good. The self-assessment report recognises the effective planning of teaching and learning. The objectives of lessons are usually made known to students. Teachers make frequent references to appropriate examples from the workplace and current affairs. Some lessons lack momentum and in others students are not allowed to exercise initiative and they are not encouraged to work on their own. Students are punctual and attentive. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there is poor attendance on certain programmes and the college has set targets this year for improved attendance. Attendance levels noted during the inspection were better than the college records showed for the previous year. Business assignments are imaginative and varied and test a range of knowledge and skills. On some courses, students fail to develop their key skills sufficiently. Assessment is carried out fairly and most teachers provide students with thorough feedback on their work. The written comments of some teachers on students' work are insufficiently helpful and constructive.

16 Students' coursework and portfolios are of an appropriate standard. Some NVQ and GNVQ portfolios are particularly well presented and they demonstrate the students' good wordprocessing and graphics skills. Students

Curriculum Areas

develop good vocational skills on secretarial and business administration, accounting and personnel courses. For the last two years, there have been high pass rates across a range of courses. Full-time and part-time secretarial and office skills students achieve a wide range of qualifications with good pass rates in single subjects, although the results on group certificate courses are poor. Overall, students' achievements on NVQ business administration programmes at levels 2, 3 and 4 are good. The self-assessment report recognises that achievements of some students are poor. Recently, however, students' achievements have improved. Students' retention rates are mostly good. The quality of students' destinations data has improved recently.

17 Teachers have appropriate knowledge and experience although the work experience of some is dated, as the self-assessment report states. All staff have access to relevant staff development, particularly in relation to the use of new information technology hardware and software. Technician staff support is available. Staff rooms are cramped, and do not have enough computing facilities. A key issue in the self-assessment relates to the poor quality of the computer provision for business teachers and

students. By the time of the inspection, this issue had been addressed and improvements had been implemented. The college now has efficient computer networks with modern software. The quality of most of the other learning resources is good, and there is a good range of office equipment, audiovisual equipment, book and non-book material. Some handouts and teaching materials produced and used by individual teachers are of poor quality. Classrooms are well equipped although some are not appropriate for the size of groups using them or for the activities which take place in them.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Intermediate GNVQ business	Retention (%)	*	86	86
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	78
NVQ level 2 accounting	Retention (%)	*	100	72
	Pass rate (%)	100	47	90
Advanced GNVQ business	Retention (%)	*	94	73
	Pass rate (%)	93	94	73
Full-time secretarial NVQ level 3 administration	Retention (%)	83	+	92
	Pass rate (%)	90	+	91

Source: college data

*college unable to provide data in format required

+course did not run in 1994-96

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 1

18 The inspectors observed 10 lessons. The inspection covered intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses. The evidence from the inspection generally supports the assessments and judgements made in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the high standard of most teaching
- carefully planned and well-prepared lessons
- a variety of effective teaching methods
- outstanding achievements of students
- good retention rates
- the successful progression of most students to employment or further and higher education
- the careful monitoring of students' performance

Weaknesses

- a lack of support for part-time teachers
- the lack of relevant qualifications and experience of some leisure and tourism teachers
- some aspects of the specialist accommodation and equipment

19 The quality of teaching in most leisure and tourism lessons is of a high standard. Students benefit from a range of effective teaching methods including regular questioning and quizzes to check that they understand the lesson, individual tuition, work in small groups, and teaching of the whole class. Teachers plan and prepare lessons carefully, and their thoroughness in doing so is a key finding of the self-assessment report. Comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans relate clearly to the relevant GNVQ units and elements. Students

receive detailed written briefs for assignments. Relationships between staff and students are positive and aid learning. Teachers complement their lessons with a programme of industrial visits for students. A recent visit to the East Midlands Airport was used in a finance lesson to illustrate fixed assets. Some overhead transparencies are of a poor quality.

20 The outstanding strength of the leisure and tourism provision is the achievement of students. The self-assessment report recognises this. In 1996 and 1997, all students on the GNVQ advanced course who completed their programme of study achieved the full award. In 1997, all students on the GNVQ intermediate course who completed their programme of study achieved the full award. In general, retention rates in 1996-97 were good. All students who enrolled on the GNVQ advanced course for 1995 to 1997, completed their programme of study and 90 per cent of the students on the GNVQ intermediate course in 1996-97 did so. The majority of students progress to employment or further and higher education. Most students organise their portfolios of work effectively. Many take additional qualifications such as the NVQ level 2 in activity leadership, and first aid and hygiene certificates.

21 As the self-assessment report claims, the section is managed effectively. It has a clear organisational structure. Leisure and tourism teachers meet regularly and they contribute effectively to the strategic planning process. Documentation for leisure and tourism courses is thorough. Targets are set for retention and pass rates and these are usually met and exceeded. The targets for pass rates are particularly demanding. Students' performance is carefully monitored. The section maintains clear data on the progression of GNVQ students.

22 Most teachers hold relevant teacher training and assessor qualifications. Few teachers are qualified to assess students' prior learning. Some lack leisure and tourism qualifications and experience of the industry.

Curriculum Areas

Few staff have updated their industrial experience. Part-time teachers receive insufficient support and this weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. In general, the range and quality of specialist books and periodicals in the library are satisfactory. There is useful keep-fit equipment in the sports hall, although the hall itself is not up to the standards found in the leisure industry.

Examples of students' achievements in leisure and tourism, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ)	Retention (%)	*	63	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	100
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ)	Retention (%)	+	+	90
	Pass rate (%)	+	+	100

Source: college data

*college unable to provide data in format required

+course did not start until 1996-97

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 2

23 The inspection covered the provision of childcare programmes within the division of health, community care and humanities. Twelve lessons were observed across the range of programmes offered. The inspectors confirmed some of the judgements made in the self-assessment report. In addition, they identified some strengths and some weaknesses which are not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching
- effective use of a range of teaching and learning resources
- the well-planned NVQ assessment programme
- good pass rates on most childcare programmes
- the provision of NVQ courses in centres away from the main college
- the effective management of provision away from the main college
- well-qualified staff with recent, relevant professional experience

Weaknesses

- a few poorly planned or poorly organised lessons
- inadequate preparation by some students for their work placement
- poor retention rates on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies
- accommodation which restricts the range of teaching and learning strategies

24 The childcare section offers two full-time programmes, a BTEC national diploma in childhood studies and an NVQ level 2 in

childcare. Both attract students aged 16 to 18. There has been a rapid expansion in the part-time provision of courses leading to NVQ qualifications at levels 2 and 3. These courses are provided at an increasing number of centres throughout north west Leicestershire. They have been particularly successful in recruiting mature childcare workers from a variety of backgrounds. The NVQ courses are a valuable feature of the college's provision because they attract members of the community who have been unable to obtain such qualifications previously.

25 Teachers are well qualified and most hold a professional qualification in childcare. The use of part-time teachers and assessors on NVQ courses who are childcare workers is a significant strength. The inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the majority of teaching and learning is well planned and effectively delivered. In most instances, the aims and objectives of lessons are made clear to students. Students on NVQ programmes are provided with action plans to help them to organise their studies successfully. Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods including tasks for small groups of students, discussion and guidance for individual students. All teachers use schemes of work and lesson plans. Many of these plans are lacking in detail, however, and they make little reference to encouraging students to work on their own. Work experience plays a prominent part in all programmes and it is valued by students. Some students require more preparation than others for their work placement. Most assignments are well designed and the guidelines for them are clear. Teachers mark coursework conscientiously and annotate it helpfully to enable students to improve their performance. There is a well-planned and effective assessment programme on NVQ courses.

26 The pass rates on childcare programmes are good. In 1997, all students who completed the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies

Curriculum Areas

achieved the award. The pass rate of nearly 90 per cent for NVQ level 2 students is excellent. Through its review procedures, the college has acknowledged the low retention rates on the BTEC national diploma course in childhood studies. Of those students who started their programme in 1994, only 56 per cent completed their studies, and in 1997, less than 50 per cent of those who originally enrolled, completed the course. The course team has made changes to the entry criteria and to the way the programme is organised and implemented. Most students on courses leading to the NVQ in childcare acquire the skills to work effectively on their own and they organise and present their portfolios of work well. They work effectively in groups and on individual learning tasks and they make good use of available resources. Students on the BTEC national diploma programme are less successful in working well by themselves and they rely too much on help and direction from their teacher.

27 Most programmes are well organised and well managed. Course reviews are conducted thoroughly and appropriate action is taken as a result of their findings. The growing amount of provision at centres away from the college and of the assessment of learning in the workplace is managed effectively, with the help of a workplace liaison officer. In general, the accommodation for childcare courses is of good quality and it contains some attractive displays of students' work. Some rooms are small and,

as a result, the scope of some learning activities which take place in them is restricted. At some centres away from the college, resources for supporting teaching and learning, such as library facilities or reprographic equipment, are insufficient.

Examples of students' achievements in childcare, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (NVQ, national diplomas and certificates)	Retention (%)	61	69	78
	Pass rate (%)	93	74	71
Intermediate vocational (NVQ)	Retention (%)	*	91	78
	Pass rate (%)	*	20	88

Source: college data

*the first courses did not complete until 1996

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

28 The findings of the support services self-assessment report, in relation to strengths and weaknesses broadly agree with those of the inspection team although the inspectors give some a greater emphasis. The self-assessment report does not report on the tutorial provision. The college has introduced a number of initiatives and many new procedures designed to build on existing elements of good practice in tutorials but at the time of the inspection, many of these had only just been implemented.

Key strengths

- the impartiality of advice and guidance for students
- the arrangements for student induction
- the personal and pastoral support for students
- the effective arrangements for helping individual students with their key skills

Weaknesses

- insufficient implementation of many new initiatives and procedures
- some poor tutorial practice
- careers education and advice
- the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of student support services

29 There is a good range of publicity material. Links with schools are improving. Many local school pupils visit the college for 'taster' days. GNVQ courses in business studies, care, and leisure and tourism are jointly run with schools. As stated in the self-assessment, sessions are regularly held in the evenings or at weekends, at which prospective students may obtain information about the college, and receive impartial guidance and advice on courses. Student advisers from student services are

always available to provide guidance and support on a range of issues. There are appropriate arrangements for the accreditation of students' prior learning but few students avail themselves of these.

30 Induction is well planned. It is efficiently carried out and it provides students with a good introduction to the college. All students have an induction programme containing a core of common elements delivered by student services. Subject specialists provide induction to specific courses. All students receive a diary containing the college charter, the college's equal opportunities policy and the complaints procedure.

31 There is inconsistency in the way tutorial support is provided across the college. In many curriculum areas, tutorials are effective and tutors provide informal support for individual students. A new tutorial procedure has been developed but tutors are unclear about what they are required to do to implement this. There has been some staff development on tutorial skills but the status and the requirements of the new procedure need further explanation. Divisional managers evaluate the effectiveness of the tutorial system. There is no overall evaluation of tutorial provision. There is no mention of tutorials in the self-assessment report.

32 The provision for learning support is well managed. A newly developed college policy is complemented by a set of procedures for the implementation of learning support and a specification of standards for it. These procedures formalise and develop existing practice. Students are tested in literacy and numeracy. There is systematic recording of the students who are identified as requiring additional support, and follow-up action is carried out to ensure they receive it. The development manager for key skills liaises with course tutors to decide the kind of support individual students need. Much of the support is provided as part of the students' course. There

Cross-college Provision

are indications that the new procedures for implementing learning support are proving effective. This year, the number of students receiving support has increased by 50 per cent.

33 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there is scope for improving careers education and guidance. There is a service level agreement with a careers and guidance services provider. The adviser from the careers service is available to interview students individually. In some instances, students receive a small amount of careers education during tutorial sessions. The self-assessment report recognises that insufficient use is being made of the facilities for careers advice which are available through student services. From September 1997, all full-time students will undertake courses in careers education and job search. A shorter but similar programme is being provided for part-time students. The careers library is being extended and improved to provide an area for group work and to offer a 'drop-in' facility for students who seek answers to specific enquiries about careers.

34 The personal support for students provided by student services is comprehensive, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. However, the services are not systematically monitored and evaluated. A good counselling service is available at all the college's sites. Student services make presentations to all groups of first-year students and they maintain close contact with residential students. The college's nursery offers care for children over two years of age. The students' union is being revived after being largely inactive for three years. A limited programme of sports activities is offered during the lunch hour and these are well attended. There is a well-stocked college shop. An accommodation officer maintains a list of approved lodgings for residential students. In addition to their main course, full-time students may also study for an additional qualification in order to broaden their skills and knowledge or

improve their career prospects. A student serves as a governor on the corporation. Some course teams have student representatives and the intention is that all should have by December 1997. A newsletter for students has been recently introduced.

General Resources

Grade 2

35 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, they identified some strengths and weaknesses which were not mentioned in the report. There have been significant improvements in resources since the self-assessment report was written.

Key strengths

- significant improvements in the range and location of accommodation
- much good-quality teaching accommodation
- the well-maintained estate
- the expanding learning resource facilities
- the modern refectory
- the accessibility of facilities to students with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- low room utilisation in some areas
- insufficient provision of recreational and sports facilities
- the lack of social areas and especially of a students' common room
- the lack of publicity for the learning facilities across the college

36 The new accommodation in Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Moira has been recently refurbished to a high standard. The provision of this new

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accommodation reflects the college's new strategy of expansion. The accommodation strategy for 1994 to 1997 was too limited in its scope and has not proved effective as a basis for planning the necessary changes to the college's estate. It is not mentioned in the self-assessment report. An accommodation strategy, for the years 1997 to 2000 has been completed recently.

37 Most classrooms are of high quality as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Twelve projects to improve the accommodation were undertaken in 1996-97 and these included the building of a new technical training centre and the erection of new security fencing. Staff rooms have been redecorated and, in some instances, carpeted. In a few instances, classrooms were used inappropriately. For example, some were used to store broken typewriters awaiting repair and others had tables stacked up in them. The mobile classrooms are poorly heated.

38 Suitable budgets are allocated for the maintenance and replacement of equipment and accommodation. A 10-year maintenance schedule for the accommodation has been established. The college has estimated its expenditure on information technology for the next three years. A three-year plan for the replacement of capital equipment has been started.

39 There is a computerised timetabling system for the whole college. The college considers that its overall use of accommodation compares satisfactorily with that of other colleges. There is, however, scope for increasing the usage of some accommodation such as B block, the motor vehicle block and the multi-skills block. In some instances, rooms are too big or too small for the classes using them.

40 In general, the library facilities meet the needs of most students as recognised in the self-assessment report. The rise in the number of students has meant that some texts are much

in demand at peak times. There is no system whereby library staff are warned of a likely demand for texts for assignments. The library usually meets requests for appropriate learning materials. A development manager has been appointed to identify the learning resources needed across the curriculum. There is a college-wide catalogue of books, journals, CD-ROMs and learning materials and this is available through the computer learning network. A wide range of open learning materials which students may study on their own is available. The library provides access to the Internet. A new learning centre is due to open in January 1998 which will incorporate the network, the library and the learning centre. The students' diary and the leaflet for students on the library and available learning resources list only the library opening times. The information bulletin for students on 'flexible learning and information and learning technology' is not easy to understand.

41 A working group is overseeing an innovative project which requires all teachers to devise alternative ways in which students may follow their course. For example, the course or syllabus is broken down into units and an estimation is made of how long completion of each unit will take. The teachers identify alternative modes of learning for their students, the requisite learning materials for these and the methods by which the students will be assessed. For example, aspects of the course leading to the NVQ in care have been successfully adapted to meet the needs of those students who cannot attend college every week. From January 1998, students at the Ashby-de-la-Zouch centre will be able to study 20 courses through open learning methods whereby they can study learning materials on their own, at times which suit them. Tutors are being trained to guide and assist students who use this form of learning.

42 A survey of students' opinions indicated that 74 per cent of students thought the

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refectory provided a high-quality service. Staffing levels in the refectory have been increased to provide an evening service. The college lacks facilities for recreational and social activities and there is no students' common room. As recognised in the self-assessment report, much of the accommodation is accessible to students with restricted mobility. Some buildings on the main site have chair lifts and automatic doors. Reserved parking spaces for people with disabilities are available. In a 'disability discrimination statement' the college states its commitment to ensure that people with disabilities are provided with ramps, automatic doors, chair lifts and special toilets.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

43 The inspectors agreed with the identification in the self-assessment report of the strengths and weaknesses of the college's quality assurance system.

Key strengths

- strong support for quality assurance by senior management and the corporation
- effective procedures for improving quality
- clear links between review, evaluation and strategic planning
- good systems of internal control through verification and audit
- systematic procedures for review and evaluation, including the use of information from surveys of students' opinions
- effective use of performance indicators
- appraisal systems for all staff
- many opportunities for all staff to further their professional development through effective training

Weaknesses

- lack of systematic review and evaluation of support areas
- some newly introduced procedures not yet effective
- lack of systematic evaluation of how the college meets its charter commitments
- insufficient information on employers' views on the quality of the college's provision
- failure to make the charter widely known to employers

44 The college has an array of procedures for monitoring the quality of the curriculum and for making improvements to it. The college has well-established measures for quality assurance. It is making adaptations to these and is introducing some new procedures. As the self-assessment report recognises, there are no quality assurance arrangements for the college's support areas and it is one of the college's major aims for 1997-98 that these should be established. A report on current issues related to the quality of the college's provision is on the agenda at every meeting of the corporation.

45 Since April 1996, the college has carried out a review of its procedures for monitoring the quality of provision. As a result of this review, it has developed new monitoring procedures, most of which cover teaching and learning. Course review and evaluation are comprehensive as identified in the self-assessment report. Information on enrolments and retention rates, reasons why students withdraw from courses, and details of planned action for improving provision, are recorded at three stages during the year.

46 An internal verification procedure was established in January 1997 which draws on previous good practices in the college. Uniform procedures are used except where particular bodies require their own to be applied. The development manager for quality reads all

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reports from external verifiers and collates comments on internal verification procedures. A systematic programme of course audits is being instituted. It was piloted in April/June 1997 through an audit of the internal verification procedures for 11 courses.

47 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first to be produced by the college. It was produced by a comprehensive process which involved course teams, managers and the corporation, and was reviewed and approved by the board of governors. There was no external representation. Quality assurance procedures form part of the college's strategic planning cycle. Evidence supporting the college's report was clearly referenced and included subsidiary self-assessments produced by teaching and cross-curricula teams. Evidence also came from lesson observations and questionnaires completed by students. Actions planned to remedy weaknesses are appropriate and target dates are set. Since the report was written, considerable progress has been made in areas such as resources and the induction of students.

48 The procedure for the validation and revalidation of programmes is effective as recognised in the self-assessment report. A number of curriculum areas are reviewed in order to ascertain: how the provision of a particular course helps the college to fulfil its strategic objectives; what changes to programmes are required as a result of research; and the progress which has been achieved through the implementation of the recommendations of previous reviews or audits. The procedure also includes the study of other relevant information about the course being validated. So far, one course has been validated. Twenty-three courses will be subject to validation or revalidation in 1997-98.

49 Surveys of students' opinions about the quality of the college's provision have taken place for a number of years. Revised questionnaires for students were introduced in

1996-97. Students are asked to respond to these three times during the year. Their responses to these questionnaires are analysed. Staff and students are informed of actions taken as a result of these surveys. The college does not systematically monitor how it meets its charter commitments. It does not collect enough information from employers on their views of the quality of the college's services and provision.

50 Most staff are aware of the staff development policy. Full-time staff recognise that the college is committed to staff development. Many part-time staff do not feel the college encourages them to develop their skills and extend their knowledge although appropriate opportunities for them to do so are available. Staff appraisal for teaching and support staff is established, as identified in the self-assessment report. Staff state that they find the appraisal process valuable. A survey of the views of staff showed that some staff were dissatisfied with the quality of the appraisal process.

Governance

Grade 2

51 In general, the findings of the inspectors and auditors matched those made by the college. Some weaknesses identified by the inspection team are not stated in the self-assessment report although they are the subject of review by governors.

Key strengths

- corporation's systematic evaluation of its own performance
- corporation's effective lead in determining the strategic direction of the college
- governors' involvement in strategic and financial planning

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- close monitoring of governors' attendance at corporation meetings
- corporation's monitoring of the quality of the college's provision against performance indicators
- clear and concise standing orders for corporation and committee proceedings
- use of 'focus groups' of governors and senior staff to discuss particular issues

Weaknesses

- over-lengthy agendas for full board meetings
- an excessive turnover of governors with business experience
- lack of an appropriate balance between the amount of business dealt with by the corporation and that delegated to committees

52 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

53 The membership of the corporation was redetermined in June 1997 and it now comprises the principal, eight business governors, including a TEC nominee, two staff governors, one student governor, two co-opted governors and one nominated governor. There has been a high turnover of governors with business experience. A nomination and governance committee, with clearly defined terms of reference, has been established recently. One of its roles is to review corporation procedures regularly. New governors are provided with a limited induction programme and this is being reviewed. Some training for governors is provided but a regular training programme for governors has not been established.

54 Governors are effectively involved in strategic planning and financial forecasting as identified in the self-assessment report. All governors receive appropriately detailed information on the financial management of the college and this is particularly useful to the members of the finance and general purposes committee. Governors are regularly provided with other management information and with reports on the progress the college is making in meeting its objectives. They are also given some information on the extent to which revenue from college activities strengthens the college's overall financial position.

55 The self-assessment report recognises that the corporation has an appropriate committee structure. Committee meetings are well attended. The terms of reference for the finance and general purposes committee are not clear or precise enough and they are under review. Agendas for corporation meetings are often too lengthy. The corporation has not achieved an appropriate balance between the amount of business it should deal with itself and the amount it should delegate to committees. When necessary, 'focus groups' of governors and senior staff are convened to discuss particular issues.

56 Clerking arrangements for the corporation are appropriate. Corporation and committee meetings have clear agendas and appropriate supporting papers. Clear and concise minutes are produced promptly and are available for public inspection in the college library. There are clear standing orders for corporation and committee proceedings. The standing orders do not include a policy on confidentiality or procedures for dealing with complaints against the corporation. There is a register of interests for governors and also for college managers with significant financial responsibilities.

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Management

Grade 2

57 Inspectors' findings, with some minor differences, match those made by the college. Some of these differences are due to improvements undertaken by the college since the completion of its self-assessment.

Key strengths

- strong commitment of staff to the college mission
- comprehensive process of strategic plan consultation
- action plans and management objectives clearly linked to corporate objectives
- revised organisational structure to support the fulfilment of the college's objectives
- use of a range of market intelligence reports and information
- effective systems for managing staff resources
- comprehensive and timely management information

Weaknesses

- limited outcomes from extensive liaison/marketing activities in 1996-97
- slow progress in implementing the equal opportunities policy
- insufficient integration of financial management reporting with the accounting system

58 The college mission is clear. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the mission is well understood and accepted by staff. Staff have participated in the development of the strategic plan. Consultation over the strategic plan has involved a significant number of industrial, community and training partners.

Market research has been used to identify skills shortages and to underpin the strategic and operational plans. Further research within the local community has been used to set operational priorities for community work.

59 Detailed curriculum and cross-college plans reflect the corporate objectives as identified in the self-assessment report. All plans clearly identify who has particular responsibilities, resource implications and targets including dates by which these must be reached. Most targets are measurable and progress towards their achievement can be clearly determined. Some targets set by course teams are over ambitious. Targets are monitored regularly. Progress towards the fulfilment of objectives is reviewed regularly by appropriate managers as a part of the routine cycle of meetings.

60 There have been three organisational changes and the most recent was completed in the summer of 1997. The principal was appointed in April 1996. The new management structure consists of the principal, deputy principal, assistant principal, finance director, three heads of division, curriculum section heads and development managers. The rationale for the new structure is that it will help the college to fulfil its main strategic objectives up to the year 2000. Development managers work to improve cross-college functions such as the promotion and development of key skills and marketing. They have responsibility for particular projects of varying length. Some staff appointed to the newly created section head posts are not fully conversant with their new roles. There is a staff development programme for these staff but it is restricted in scope.

61 Most job descriptions clearly set out the responsibilities of post-holders although some need to be updated in the light of recent organisational changes as recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff understand the lines of management. Divisional managers are clear about their responsibilities including their

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responsibilities, recently devolved to them, for staffing and resource management. Systems to support them are effective. Further devolution of resource budgets is planned.

62 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the financial management of the college is good. The head of finance is suitably qualified and is a member of the senior management group. The finance team is suitably resourced for its responsibilities. Strategic plans, financial forecasts and annual budgets are appropriately integrated. Procedures for the production of plans and forecasts are well documented. There is an appropriate timetable for financial management reporting and this is adhered to. Financial management information is well presented and the senior management group meets frequently to consider it. The reporting of this information is not fully integrated with the accounting system. Budget-holders receive comprehensive monthly reports.

63 Internal communications between most staff are effective. The self-assessment report recognises the need for some improvement in communications for part-time staff and this was endorsed by inspectors. Some progress, however, has been made in addressing this issue. There are regular staff meetings at all levels although not all part-time staff can attend these. The staff newsletter is sent to all staff. It has been substantially improved to provide regular updating on policies, projects, changes and facilities. The principal's reports to the corporation are sent to all staff.

64 The academic board focuses effectively on academic developments, on teaching and learning and, through the quality committee, on the quality of the college's provision. It has recently extended its membership to include more teachers. It receives reports on college projects which have had an effect upon the quality of teaching. Task groups are set up as required to report on a range of initiatives such as 'inclusive learning' and the Tomlinson report

on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Recommendations are made on college papers such as the quality statements which are used when the work of staff in the classroom is observed.

65 There is effective liaison with a range of external organisations involved in education and training as stated in the self-assessment report. Senior managers represent the college on a range of committees, steering groups and management boards. The links with the TEC, training providers, and various chambers of commerce have resulted in funding or the provision of training. Collaboration with another further education college has resulted in increased education and training opportunities in the community. There was a significant drive to market the college to employers and local community groups in 1996-97. An impressive programme of liaison visits took place but there was insufficient recording of the outcomes of this. New monitoring and recording procedures are being instituted. Regional market intelligence is used in preparing business plans for major new initiatives such as the development of the Ashby-de-la-Zouch centre. There is insufficient information on the local demand for some aspects of the provision offered.

66 The college meets the required deadlines with its returns to the FEFC. The use of information technology in support of both management and teaching and learning has been reviewed recently. Increasingly, information technology is used effectively to achieve operational and strategic objectives as recognised in the self-assessment report. Enrolment data are readily available and students' attendance is analysed annually. Data on retention rates are collected regularly and analysed. A needs analysis of information for managers is being completed. An electronic mail facility is in use for senior managers and is to be extended to other staff. The accessibility of centrally held information is being improved through the use of the computer network.

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67 The equal opportunities policy was approved by governors in March 1997. It states the need for explicit, measurable and achievable targets in relation to equal opportunities, but these have not yet been set. The effectiveness of the policy is not monitored in detail. There are appropriate policies and procedures for the recruitment and appointment of staff. Statistics on the ethnicity, gender and disablement profile of staff are gathered and are reported annually. There is a staff development programme to help staff understand the issues associated with equality of opportunity.

Conclusions

68 The inspection team found that the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. In most respects, inspectors agree with the judgements reached by the college. Strengths were generally accurately identified. In a few cases, weaknesses were either not identified or were understated. Inspectors agreed with most curriculum and cross-college grades awarded by the college.

69 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	25
19-24 years	14
25+ years	60
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	7
Intermediate	63
Advanced	26
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	22	891	10
Agriculture	0	12	0
Construction	102	619	8
Engineering	165	2,255	25
Business	90	1,319	15
Hotel and catering	93	202	3
Health and community care	656	1,586	24
Art and design	19	206	2
Humanities	32	696	8
Basic education	10	475	5
Total	1,189	8,261	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (September 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	83	0	0	83
Supporting direct learning contact	25	0	0	25
Other support	63	0	0	63
Total	171	0	0	171

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£4,604,000	£4,034,000	£4,965,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.64	£18.07	£19.49
Payroll as a proportion of income	65%	71%	64%
Achievement of funding target	95%	113%	*
Diversity of income	27%	25%	30%
Operating surplus	-£189,000	-£465,000	-£208,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	9	8	3
	Average point score per entry	2.0	1.8	3.3
	Position in tables	bottom 10%	bottom 10%	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	92	76	267
	Percentage achieving qualification	86%	92%	87%
	Position in tables	top third	top 10%	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	19	35
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	100%	63%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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